

**What is bird flu?**

Avian influenza or “bird flu” is an infection found in birds caused by the influenza A virus. There are many different types of bird flu, some that cause disease and some that do not. In recent times, the term bird flu has often been used to describe the H5N1 avian influenza virus.

In domestic poultry such as chickens or turkeys, infection with avian influenza viruses may cause two different types of illness. They are differentiated by the level of disease severity. The so-called “low pathogenic” form commonly causes only mild symptoms (ruffled feathers, a drop in egg production) and may easily go undetected. The “high pathogenic” form is more severe. It spreads very rapidly through poultry flocks, causes disease and has a death rate that can approach 100 percent, often within days.

Who is at risk for bird flu?

In most instances, avian influenza viruses do not cause human illness. However, some of these viruses do develop the ability to infect people. People may become infected when they have prolonged contact with infected birds, especially domestic birds. People also may become ill from exposure to areas or surfaces contaminated with bird feces or respiratory secretions. Swimming in water where the carcasses of dead, infected birds have been discarded or water that may have been contaminated by feces from infected birds might be another source of exposure.

What are the symptoms of bird flu?

Most avian influenza viruses do not cause illness in people. People infected with avian flu viruses may have a variety of symptoms depending on the type of avian influenza virus. Some people may only develop mild eye infections. In some instances, symptoms are very similar to that of seasonal human influenza, including fever, chills, headache, cough and body aches. Less often, diarrhea, vomiting, abdominal pain, chest pain and bleeding from the nose and gums also have been reported. Symptoms also may lead to death due to severe pneumonia and other respiratory complications.

How soon do symptoms appear?

The time it takes for a person to develop symptoms after infection is unknown and is likely to depend on the type of influenza virus.

How is bird flu spread?

Avian influenza can spread from infected birds to people; however, this happens very rarely. People become infected when they have prolonged contact with nasal discharge or fecal droppings of infected birds. In general, people can not spread avian flu to other people.

Sometimes avian influenza viruses will change over time. If the right changes occur, it may become possible for people to spread this flu virus from person to person. If this were to happen, the North Dakota Department of Health would provide additional precaution information to the public.

When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?

In general, people are not able to spread the disease.

How is a person diagnosed?

Diagnosis may be based on the appearance of classic signs and symptoms, a history of travel to a country or area where bird flu is found and/or evidence of prolonged bird exposure. Also, laboratory tests are available in order to confirm this diagnosis.

What is the treatment?

Antibiotics will not work against avian influenza. Limited evidence suggests that some antiviral drugs may shorten the amount of time a person is ill and improve the chance of survival. However, these drugs should be given within 48 hours after the first symptoms appear to provide the most benefit.

Does past infection make a person immune?

It is unknown at this time.

Should children or others be excluded from day care, school, work or other activities if they have bird flu?

This will depend on the type of avian influenza virus and the severity of the human disease it might cause. Consult with your doctor or local or state health department for further guidance.

What can be done to prevent the spread of bird flu among people?

The best way to prevent the spread of bird flu is to reduce your exposure to sick and dying birds. View wildlife from a distance and don't touch dead or sick animals. If you notice sick or dying birds, report it to local wildlife or public health officials or veterinarians.

Additional Information:

Additional information is available at www.ndflu.com or by calling the North Dakota Department of Health at 800.472.2180. For additional information about the disease in birds, call the Board of Animal Health at 701.328.2654 or visit www.agdepartment.com/Programs/Livestock/BOAH/AvianInfluenza.htm

This disease is a reportable condition in humans and animals. As mandated by North Dakota law, any incidence of this disease shall be reported to the North Dakota Department of Health (human) or the state veterinarian (domestic birds).

Resource: World Health Organization website: www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/avian_faqs/en/index.html

